

(Residence "A") Barnsdall Park
4800 Hollywood Boulevard
Los Angeles, Los Angeles County
California

HABS No. CAL-357

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Western Office, Division of Design and Construction
450 Golden Gate Avenue
San Francisco, California

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PHOTOGRAPH-DATA BOOK REPORT
HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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RESIDENCE "A" BARNSDALL PARK

Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California

ADDRESS: 4800 Hollywood Boulevard
OWNER: City of Los Angeles
OCCUPANT: Department of Recreation and Parks
USE: Arts and Crafts Building

ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Residence "A" is important mainly as one of two surviving structures on Olive Hill (Barnsdall Park) which represent the first work of architect Frank Lloyd Wright in the Los Angeles region. It was completed in 1920. This studio-residence was commissioned by the original owner, Aline Barnsdall, as a part of a dream of a great art center for Los Angeles. Although a lesser work of the great American architect, it remains, nevertheless, a landmark of the rapidly vanishing heritage of early modern architecture in Southern California. In February of 1965, the Southern California Chapter, AIA, submitted Residence "A" (together with Hollyhock House nearby) to the Cultural Heritage Board of Los Angeles as an historic-cultural monument of the City. The submission was adopted, at this time, with the inclusion of the entire surrounding grounds (Barnsdall Park) as well.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Aline Barnsdall, the daughter of a millionaire and close friend of Emma Goldman, planned that the old olive grove she had purchased in Hollywood should become the cultural center of Los Angeles. While it never quite rose to her extravagant expectations, it did provide the scene for some of the most distinguished work of America's greatest architect, Frank Lloyd Wright. He made several plans for the city

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block bounded by Vermont Avenue, Hollywood Boulevard, Edgemont Street and Sunset Boulevard, which included pools, educational buildings, shops, a theater and studios and residences for artists, as well as an imposing villa for Miss Barnsdall.

Of the various projected buildings only the villa, "Hollyhock House" and two studio-residences were built, comprising Wright's first completed commissions in the Los Angeles area. Of these Studio-Residence "B" (supervised by architect Rudolph Schindler who strongly affected the design of the finished work) was demolished in 1954.

Residence "A" which still stands, though in badly deteriorated exterior condition, was intended to be the studio-residence of the director of the projected art center. The supervision was by Rudolph Schindler assisted by Lloyd Wright, the latter having prepared the working drawings developed from his father's preliminary plans. The house was begun in 1919 and finished (as was Studio-Residence "B") substantially by 1920. It should be noted that the work was in progress during a period that Wright was largely outside of the country making inspection trips to his work in Japan.

In spite of its decoration (more Moslem than Mayan) which is an abstract geometric pattern based upon the hollyhock (as is the decoration for the Hollyhock House, although more complex) Residence "A" gives the impression of a very different style from that of the Barnsdall Mansion. It is, in fact, a reflection of Wright's earlier Prairie style, whatever the incongruity in Southern California, and bears a striking similarity to a project for "a fireproof house for \$5000" which Wright designed for the Curtis Publishing Company in 1906.

Some architectural changes have been made by the City during its use as an Arts and Crafts Building, operated by the Recreation and Parks Department. These include the removal of the original north balcony and replacement by a crudely designed wooden one, presently seen. A wooden stairway and door have also been added on the west side leading to the second floor. All of which has disfigured the composition of this elevation. In general, exterior garden walls have been allowed to deteriorate and little, if any, maintenance work such as painting and repairing of cracks has been provided in recent years. A few years ago a roadway was cut directly in front of the building and thereby destroyed a charming, curved walkway approach through pleasant landscaping.

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The Historic Buildings Committee of the Southern California Chapter, AIA, in February of 1965, offered to prepare a rehabilitation study of the building, along with Hollyhock House, to be used as a guide by the City for restoration of these landmarks. The offer was enthusiastically accepted by the Cultural Heritage Board of Los Angeles and these studies are currently in progress with the objective and hope that these unique examples of our architectural heritage will be restored once more to their former elegance and charm.

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Interviews with Lloyd Wright in 1964 and 1965 by Raymond Girvigian, AIA.

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ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The following data is based upon an interview with Lloyd Wright, son of the Architect, July 31, 1965, as well as inspection at the site, August 21, 1965, and upon drawings and photographs from the book "THE LIFE WORK OF THE ARCHITECT FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT." (See References)

EXTERIOR

Overall Dimension - 67' x 45', approximately, including balcony.

Wall Construction - The basic system employed: concrete foundations (which were also retaining walls on the lower side of the hill); cement block masonry units, which continued above the second floor roof as parapets on the northern end of the structure; over some portions of these walls, 2 x studs were furred and plastered, with a belt course of ornamental cast cement block based on the hollyhock motif, keyed into the structural wall both at base of the studs and as a cap above in order to "create depth and movement in the planes", as Lloyd Wright remarked in the above mentioned interview.

Porches - The existing crude wood balcony on the north elevation is a recent replacement for the original; the latter was cantilevered, of wood-framed construction, finished with cement plaster and had a typical band of cast block ornament. The wood stair and porch entrance to the second floor at the west elevation is a recent addition by the City.

Chimneys - The flues are concealed in a rectangular penthouse projection on the roof, finished to match the exterior walls and decorated with typical cast block bands.

Doorways and Doors - The main entrance from the west terrace is a pair of wood framed doors divided by 9 horizontal wood muntins 6" c.c., vertically, and flanked by narrow sidelights divided horizontally in the center with a single muntin surrounded by painted, softwood frames. Five French doors on the north elevation, leading from the living room to the balcony are 1'-10 $\frac{1}{2}$ " wide x 6'-4" high with screen doors on the interior side; above the doors, separated by 2" wood transom rails, are fixed glass panels extending up to the ceiling. These narrow panels of doors

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and fixed glass transoms are approximately 13'-3" high and alternate with solid wall panels of equal width; framed by surrounding architrave bands of typical cast block ornament on the exterior, and plain, plaster finish on the interior.

Windows - Typically wood sash with wood framed interior screens, and usually grouped in long horizontal bands by a series of wood mullions. The south wing second floor has awning type, top-hinged out-swing windows, flanked by casement windows at each end, the latter having 6 panes horizontally divided. The second floor kitchen, west elevation, has a series of casement type; each window is divided by 2 vertical wood muntins. Narrow bands of clerestory windows are also used. An unusual fenestration motif is the use of narrow, vertical glazed openings on the east elevation, extending from the first floor to the second floor, uninterrupted by the floor construction which is concealed behind the opening. The general handling of horizontal fenestration is an expression related to Wright's Prairie style houses.

Roof - The various roof planes are typically flat, constructed of wood joists, wood sheathing and finished with composition, built-up roofing and gravel. Parts of the east and west and the entire north elevation are bordered by a projection of exterior cement block walls forming a parapet. However, the south wing presents a contrast of horizontal, cantilevered roof planes. The fascias are painted softwood; eave soffits are plaster finished.

Cornice - A continuous band of typical ornamental cast block extends around the walls of the south wing under the eaves and continues down around the jambs of openings.

Miscellaneous - Various auxilliary walls, as at gardens, terraces, and retaining walls, are all consistently decorated with the typical cast block ornamental bands usually running horizontally along the top and continuing down at the ends. This motif is used also to accent various openings and projecting planes.

INTERIOR

Floor Plan - Basically the plan consists of a first and second floor with a basement. It is oriented in a north-south direction

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with projecting masses to the east and west at the north end. Entering the first floor from the narrow west terrace, one steps into a low-ceiling hall, less than 7' in height. Directly ahead (east) and 2 steps down is the study. To the left (north) is a low-ceiling vestibule which opens into the impressive high ceillinged (13'-3") living room with its full height panels of French doors and transoms yielding an exceptional view of the Hollywood Hills. This room features a brick fireplace, now closed, and open wood grilles at the upper south wall which screens the second floor hallway. Overlooking the living room from the west end is the dining room on the second floor protected by a low wall. To the south of the dining room is the kitchen. To the east of the kitchen were two bedrooms, formerly. The partitions have been removed and this wing is now one large room used by the City for handicraft instruction. To the east was another bedroom and above this is a small penthouse room leading to the roof and punctuated by windows. In general, few structural alterations have been made, but the building has been tragically neglected and is badly in need of repair.

Flooring - The entrance hall has exposed cement, scored in rectangles to appear as pavers. The hearth in the living room is of similar design. The typical flooring is 1" x 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ " wide maple, T&G random planks on wood joists. The basement is of plain concrete.

Walls - Structural walls are concrete or plastered cement block. Non-bearing walls are wood stud and plaster finished.

Doorways and Doors - Wood frame, flush slab with applied simple casing around - $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 1-3/4", painted.

Base - Softwood, painted, 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 3/4" with a 5/16" x 1-3/4" notch at the top for decorative effect and a quarter round wood shoe at floor. No base at basement, plaster extends to floor.

Ceilings - Typically plaster. The entrance hall has a cornice treatment of the typical cast ornamental block. The living room ceiling has a double band of wood moulding running around the perimeter as a border. In general, there are no cornices.


Miscellaneous - The decorative grilles in the living room are

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composed of $3/4"$ x $1-7/8"$ wood slats at $2\frac{1}{2}"$ c.c. spaced by $1-3/4"$ blocks between, $5\frac{1}{2}"$ above the floor. The stair has wood base skirts following the profile of the steps. The hardwood handrail is of simple rectangle shape $1-3/8"$ x $2-3/8"$, supported by brass brackets. Note: built-in cabinets in kitchen.

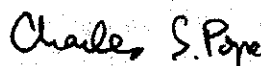
Hardware - Is mainly original: butt hinges, mortised locks, metal knobs, operating window sash, etc.

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